LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION

Vol. 13 (2019), pp. 580–585
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc
http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24900
Revised Version Received: 3 Aug 2019

Language names and nonlinguists: A response to Haspelmath

Matthew S. Dryer
University at Buffalo

Haspelmath (2017) proposes a set of principles governing language names. I discuss various issues with his proposals centering around the fact that Haspelmath does not give sufficient consideration for the need for linguists to consider the use of names by nonlinguists in choosing names.

Haspelmath (2017) proposes a set of principles governing language names. While I am in agreement with many of the principles he proposes, there is one factor that his discussion ignores that has important ramifications for issues surrounding language names. Haspelmath's discussion seems to assume that it is linguists who choose names for languages and that when linguists start using a name that is different from names that were used previously by linguists, it is the linguists who are changing the name of the language. While there is no doubt that this is often the case, there are many instances in which it is nonlinguists who start using a new name for a language and when the linguists adopt use of this name, they are simply conforming to existing usage rather than using a new name for the language. In fact, given Haspelmath's principle that languages should only have one name, it follows that linguists ought to adopt the new name rather than using an old name while nonlinguists are using a different name. And while it may be appropriate for linguists to tell other linguists what they ought to call languages, I assume that it is not appropriate for linguists to tell nonlinguists what language names they ought to use. I illustrate these issues by reference to two names that have been used for a language that I myself have worked on, known earlier as Kutenai and more recently as Ktunaxa. Haspelmath raises a variety of objections specifically to the name Ktunaxa, but I will argue that, largely based on his own principles, his objections are not valid.

The earlier name Kutenai is used by most works until recently, including Boas (1918), Garvin (1947; 1948a; 1948b; 1948c), and Morgan (1991). I myself also have used that name in a number of papers, except for Dryer (1996), where I used "Ktunaxa (Kutenai)", a helpful device to forewarn others that the language being called Ktunaxa is the same as the language previously known as Kutenai. More recent work by linguists use the name Ktunaxa, such as Blamire (2011), Tammpere, Birdstone, & Wiltschko (2012), McClay & Birdstone (2015), Guntly & Wiltschko (2016), McAllister-Day (2016; 2017), Bertrand, Birdstone, & Wiltschko (2017), and

E-ISSN 1934-5275

McClay (2017). However, contrary to what Haspelmath's discussion might imply, none of the linguists who have used the name Ktunaxa are in any sense changing the name of the language. Rather, they are simply using the name already used by most nonlinguists. If there was a name change, that change was due to nonlinguists.

Now strictly speaking, the widespread use in English of the name Ktunaxa by nonlinguists is primarily the name, not for the Ktunaxa language, but for the Ktunaxa people. But the reasons that Haspelmath gives for why it is undesirable to have more than one name for the same language are equally well reasons not to have different names for a people and the language associated with those people, as long as there is a one-to-one relationship between the two. And it is generally assumed that when there is such a one-to-one relationship, the name will be the same.

It is of course the case that the name Ktunaxa is also the name in Ktunaxa for themselves and their language. It is worth stressing, however, that although the name is spelled the same way in Ktunaxa and English, it is pronounced differently. In Ktunaxa, it is pronounced [ktunaxa]; in English, it is pronounced something like [tunaha]. The use in English of the name Ktunaxa both for the Ktunaxa people and the Ktunaxa language includes use by the Ktunaxa themselves. It is necessary to emphasize that most Ktunaxa do not speak the language, at least as their first language, so that in general when the Ktunaxa people are using that name either for themselves or for the language traditionally associated with them, they are using that name in English.

There is ample evidence for the use of the name Ktunaxa for the Ktunaxa people by nonlinguists. Its use in the press is illustrated by a story online from the Canadian Broadcast Corporation[1] and in the Guardian.[2] It is used by the Supreme Court of Canada[3] and by the provincial government of British Columbia.[4]

This name is also standardly used in recent years by academics outside of linguistics, as in the doctoral dissertations Owens (2011) (in Geography) and Horsethief (2012) (in Leadership Studies) and the following Masters theses: Lacombe (1998) (in Resource and Environmental Development), Wood (2000) (in Environmental Design), True (2001) (in Leadership and Training), Henley (2010) (in Resources Management), Gahr (2014) (in Professional Communication), Coleman (2013) (in History), and Tarasiuk (2017) (in Human Security and Peacebuilding).

Given this widespread use of the name Ktunaxa for the people and given that the Ktunaxa people call their language Ktunaxa when speaking English, it follows from both the principle that each language has one name and the principle that the same name should be used for a people and their language when these are in a one-to-one relationship that linguists were doing the right thing when they more recently started calling the language Ktunaxa. The general principle is that when nonlinguists normally use a name for a people or their language, linguists should use that name.

[1]http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/supreme-court-canada-ktunaxa-1.4385234.
[2]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/03/canada-supreme-court-ski-resort-indigenous-sacred-land.
[3]https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/info/sum-som-eng.aspx?cas=36664.
[4]https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/ktunaxa-nation.

When Haspelmath (2017) says, "There seems to be a tendency among fieldworkers to use new English names for languages that were previously known by some other name" (84), he ignores the fact that they often do so because nonlinguists started using the new name before the linguists did.

Haspelmath brings up the name Ktunaxa in the context of avoiding sound combinations that are "unpronounceable" in English: "Moreover, sound combinations that are unpronounceable in English are best avoided, so *Kutenai* is better than *Ktunaxa* (which also violates the principles of §4 and §6)" (88). Quite apart from the fact that Ktunaxa is already the established name in English, which presumably overrides the issue Haspelmath raises, I should note that English has a pronunciation principle that applies to the initial cluster in this name: If the initial cluster is not pronounceable, do not pronounce the initial consonant (as in *know, psyche*, and *pneumatic*, as well as proper names like *Tkachuk*, which is pronounced [kætʃʊk]); this is in fact exactly how the initial cluster *Ktunaxa* is pronounced in English. His principle in §4 that he refers to is "New language names are not introduced unless none of the existing names is acceptable for some reason" (84). Again, his wording ignores the possibility that it was nonlinguists who started using this name. Since the use of this name by linguists was "introducing" a new name only in the sense of introducing it into linguistics, then either his principle does not apply (since they were not introducing the name) or his principle is incorrect, since introducing a name into the field when that is the standard name outside of linguistics is required by his principle in §3 ("Each language has a unique name") (83). Haspelmath also says that the name Ktunaxa violates his principle in §6 ("Language names in English are written with ordinary English letters, plus some other well-known letters") (85), but although the <x> is being used to represent [h], which is clearly nonstandard, it isn't clear how this violates his principle in §6. It does violate his principle in §7 ("Highly unusual pronunciation values of English letters are not acceptable") (87), since the <x> is pronounced as [h], but again his principle ignores the possibility that the highly unusual pronunciation value might already be established among nonlinguists.

Nonlinguists play a role in introducing new names for languages (or for peoples and by extension, their language). But nonlinguists are also important in that they have to be able to use language names. What this means is that one factor governing the choice of names, when linguists are choosing names for some reason, is to use names that are easy to pronounce and easy to remember. Most of Haspelmath's principles in fact not only conform to this idea, but encourage the choice of names that conform to this idea. However, Haspelmath is oddly inconsistent in one respect. He allows the use of diacritic symbols that occur in other European languages, as in <ñ>, <ê>, and <à>. But this violates his principle in §8 ("Language names must be pronounceable for English speakers") (88), since letters with diacritic symbols are not part of the English language and hence are not pronounceable for English speakers. Here, Haspelmath seems once again to be assuming that language names are for linguists. But I maintain that linguists can deal with challenges in pronunciation more easily than nonlinguists, so priority should be given to nonlinguists.

Some uses of diacritics are, in my opinion, particularly bad. While there are established meanings at least within linguistics of <ñ> and <ü>, there are no established meanings for most other diacritics. Hence most linguists have little basis for knowing what <ê> means in *Anêm*, what <â> means in *Nyelâyu*, what <ä> means in *Ngäbere*, what <à> means in *Ncàm*, or what <è> or <î> means in *Cèmuhî*. I find this use of diacritics worse than many of the things Haspelmath objects to. Haspelmath objects to the use of apostrophes in language names because "it is easily overlooked and may thus lead to confusion" (87); but surely this reasoning applies even more strongly to the use of diacritics since the apostrophe is part of the English writing system, which the diacritics are not. Furthermore, one use of the apostrophe, between two vowels, is easily understood by nonlinguists, as in *Ida'an*, not as a glottal stop per se, but simply as an indication that the two vowels are not pronounced together. This use is sufficiently iconic that it is easily interpreted correctly by nonlinguists, and is used in this way in one of the spellings in English of *Hawai'i* (except that conventionally, Hawai'i is spelled with a left quotation mark rather than a right quotation mark).

The main point of this article is that in discussing issues about choice of language names, it is important not to overlook the use of names by nonlinguists, both in their role in introducing new language names and in choosing names that are more easily used by nonlinguists. While many of Haspelmath's proposals are reasonable, too much of his discussion ignores the role that nonlinguists play in choice of language names.

References

Bertrand, Anne, Violet Birdstone, & Martina Wiltschko. 2017. Verbal obviation in Ktunaxa. Paper delivered at the 49th Annual Algonquian Conference, Université du Quebec à Montréal, October 27–29.

Blamire, Emily. 2011. The ordering of preverb strings in Ktunaxa. In *Papers for the 46th International Conference on Salish and Neighbouring Languages*, 32–42. Vancouver: University of British Columbia. http://lingpapers.sites.olt.ubc.ca/-files/2018/01/2011_Blamire.pdf.

Boas, Franz. 1918. *Kutenai Tales*. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 59. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

Coleman, Robert. 2013. Landscape of power, landscape of identity: The transforming human relationship with the Kootenai River Valley. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University (Masters thesis). https://repository.asu.edu/items/17918.

Dryer, Matthew S. 1996. *Grammatical relations in Ktunaxa (Kutenai): The Belcourt Lecture delivered before the University of Manitoba on February 24, 1995*. Winnipeg: Voices of Rupert's Land.

Gahr, Tanya Laing. 2014. The origins of culture: An ethnographic exploration of the Ktunaxa creation stories. Victoria, BC: Royal Roads University (Masters thesis).

Garvin, Paul L. 1947. *Kutenai Grammar*. Bloomington: Indiana University (Doctoral dissertation).

Garvin, Paul L. 1948a. Kutenai I: Phonemics. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 14. 37–42.
Garvin, Paul L. 1948b. Kutenai II: Morpheme variations. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 14. 87–90.
Garvin, Paul L. 1948c. Kutenai III: Morpheme distributions (prefix, theme, suffix). *International Journal of American Linguistics* 14. 171–187.
Guntly, Erin & Martina Wiltschko. 2016. Response markers in Ktunaxa. Poster given at Semantics of Understudied Languages of the Americas.
Haspelmath, Martin. 2017. Some principles for language names. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 11. 81–93. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/24725.
Henley, Heather. 2010. Land and language: Exploring the uses of the Ktunaxa Nation Network in British Columbia, Canada. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba (Masters thesis).
Horsethief, Christopher. 2012. *Emergent complex behavior in social networks: Examples from the Ktunaxa speech community*. Spokane, WA: Gonzaga University (Doctoral dissertation).
Lacombe, Gabriel. 1998. Treaty negotiations related to Kootenay National Park: An opportunity for reconciling the interests of the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council and Parks Canada? Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University (Masters thesis).
McAllister-Day, T. K. 2016. Tense in Ktunaxa. Talk given at the University of Washington Department of Linguistics 5th Annual Undergraduate Linguistics Research Colloquium.
McAllister-Day, T. K. 2017. Word order in Ktunaxa matrix and embedded clauses. Poster presented at the 11th Annual Cornell Undergraduate Linguistics Colloquium, Ithaca, New York, April 29–30.
McClay, Elise Kedersha. 2017. Focus in Ktunaxa: Word order and prosody. Vancouver: University of British Columbia (Masters thesis). http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61440.
McClay, E.K. & Violet Birdstone. 2015. Evidence for question formation by direct *wh*-movement in Ktunaxa. *UBC Working Papers in Linguistics* 40. 89–102. https://lingpapers.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2018/01/10-McClay_Birdstone_ICSNL50_final.pdf.
Morgan, Lawrence. 1991. *A description of the Kutenai language*. Berkeley: University of California (Doctoral dissertation). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0f76g7f2.
Owens, Cameron E. 2011. *Contesting sustainability in the Valley of the Grizzly Spirit: Models of justice in environmental conflict and assessment*. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University (Doctoral dissertation). http://summit.sfu.ca/item/12090.
Tammpere, Laura, Violet Birdstone, & Martina Wiltschko. 2012. Independent pronouns in Ktunaxa. *UBC Working Papers in Linguistics* 32. 325–339. https://lingpapers.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2018/01/2012_Tammpere_Birdstone_Wiltschko.pdf.
Tarasiuk, Rayne. 2017. Gender, participation, and environmental decision-making: Case study of the proposed Jumbo Glacier Resort. Victoria, BC: Royal Roads University (Masters thesis). http://hdl.handle.net/10170/1043.
True, Robyn Daphne. 2001. What can the College of the Rockies do to create a more meaningful and successful learning environment for mature aboriginal women? Victoria, BC: Royal Roads University (Masters thesis).

Wood, Barry Paul. 2000. A multi-regional analysis of heritage management: An approach to building new partnerships. Calgary: University of Calgary (Masters thesis).

Matthew S. Dryer
dryer@buffalo.edu